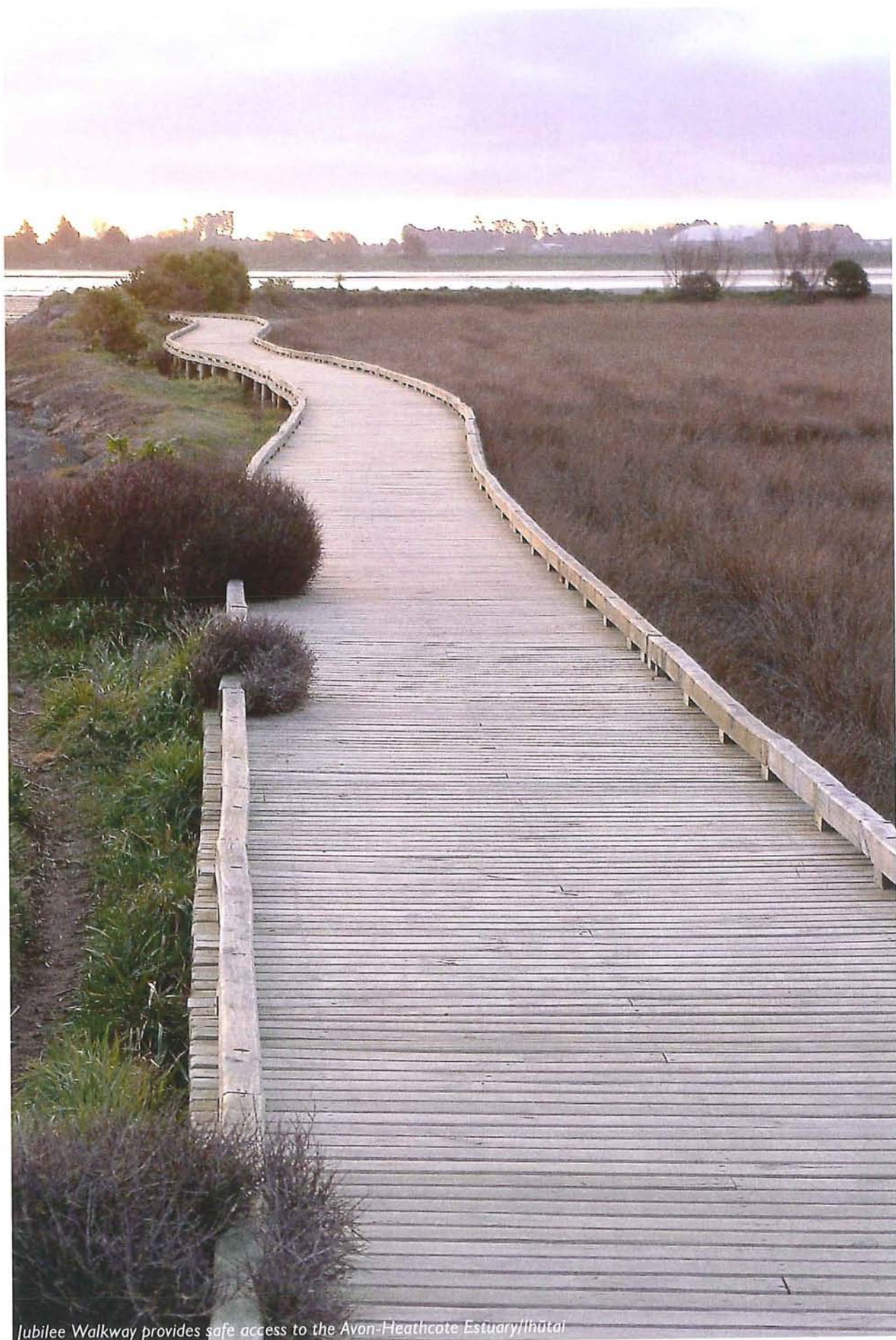




16

Public Access

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Jubilee Walkway provides safe access to the Avon-Heathcote Estuary/Ihūtai

16.1 Introduction

Providing for public access to and along the coast, lakes, and rivers is a matter of national importance pursuant to the Resource Management Act (RMA; Part 2, Section 6b). Consequently, the Proposed Christchurch City Plan (Christchurch City Council 1999) contains objectives and policies on public access, which are given effect by rules that govern the creation of esplanade reserves and strips on subdivision along rivers.

Residents regard public access to Christchurch's waterways and wetlands as highly important, and they place a high value on current and future public access (Global Leisure Group, 2002a, b, c). The Christchurch City Council is particularly pro-active in working with landowners to provide for public access along waterways and wetlands. Legal instruments such as voluntary esplanade strips and conservation covenants are often used for this express purpose. Each year, there is significant expenditure committed through the annual plan and budget in order to improve the public access facilities.

Public access rights are protected by several existing instruments that apply to various reaches of the City's waterways. These instruments include:

- local purpose reserves (for drainage or other purposes)
- unformed legal roads (e.g. Styx River/Pūrākaunui below Marshlands Road)
- marginal strips (e.g. a marginal strip along the Heathcote River/Ōpāwaho at Aynsley Terrace, Figure 16-1)
- conservation covenants (e.g. a private wetland on rural property adjoining Clearwater Resort)
- recreation reserves
- esplanade reserves
- nature reserves, etc.

Public access to these areas is usually at the discretion of the Council, so access is not always guaranteed.

The guiding principle of the Council is that all opportunities should be taken to provide for the legal right of public access along the margins of waterways and wetlands. The nature and timing of public access facilities such as tracks, pathways, fences, and stiles to be provided, are matters of design and budgeting. The infrastructure provided must be appropriate to the site and its values. For example:

- public access should be restricted to restoration planting areas for three or more years, until the plants become well established

- tracks and pathways should always avoid sensitive wildlife areas (Figure 16-2).

Providing public access is often a sensitive issue when negotiating voluntary esplanade strips and conservation covenants with landowners. In general, an agreement should not preclude the right of public access at some time in the future. These instruments provide flexibility to specify appropriate conditions, circumstances, and timing relating to public access.



Figure 16-1: A marginal strip along the Heathcote River/Ōpāwaho near Aynsley Terrace provides for public access.



Figure 16-2: This viewing platform at Travis Wetland allows observation of wildlife and views of the wetland, while preventing access to sensitive wildlife areas.

16.2 Planning and Design Considerations

Planning for public access should always include:

- Consultation with affected residents, especially immediate neighbours. One vital key to success is an unequivocal stance by Council on the need to provide for public access, tempered by accommodating adjoining residents' desires on design details.



Figure 16-3: Interpretation signs concentrate the impact of public access and enhances the waterway experience. Heathcote River/Ōpāwaho below Steamwharf Stream.



Figure 16-4: Raised walkways provide the public with safe access to a once inaccessible area. However, first consider retaining the area's inaccessibility to facilitate a wildlife refuge area. Ōtūkaikino wetland.

- Provision of a generous width for the public corridor. Ten metres from water's edge to the common boundary is the desirable minimum distance where open, see-through, or low fences (1.2 m or less) are proposed. Fifteen metres is a desirable minimum where solid, high fences are proposed. It is difficult to provide adequately for margin planting, pathway, and shrubs or trees while meeting safe city criteria in narrower corridors.
- Provision of continuous access over a short time frame (less than 5 years) from a public entry point to public exit point (e.g. continuous between two public roads).

Design for public access should always consider:

- The security and privacy of adjoining residents. Open-style fencing comprising at least 75% of open area is recommended along the common boundary, together with good planting plans that have been developed with adjoining residents. Clear definition of the boundary between public and private areas is also helpful. For further guidance, refer to Christchurch Safer Community Council (1996).
- Appropriate infrastructure related to intended use. Vary widths of pathways according to the site, context, user and level of use. For example, a grass track is adequate for low pedestrian use whereas a 2 metre wide asphalt path may be necessary for high pedestrian and cycle use.
- Placement of interpretation panels, viewpoints, benches, jetties, etc to concentrate the impact of public access at appropriate places and enhance the public's waterway experience (Figure 16-3).
- Restricting access by people and dogs to sensitive wildlife and conservation areas. Design techniques include screen planting and fencing, and the use of water as a barrier.
- Creating access to areas that would otherwise be inaccessible can be achieved by providing raised walkways (Figure 15-2). However, consider using such areas as refuges for sensitive wildlife, and so maintain the area's inaccessibility.
- Providing safe, convenient access to the water, that is suitable for children's play and boat launching.
- Provide for people with disabilities wherever possible (see Christchurch City Council 2002).
- Ways to improve the navigability of waterways. Boat access points should always be provided, and obstacles removed from the channel in all reaches where navigation is feasible.
- Inviting entrance and exit points, but avoid a proliferation of signs.

- Seeking linkages along waterways, parks, roads, reserves, and other public spaces. A recent leisure survey (Global Leisure Group, 2002a, b, c) demonstrated a need from a wide group of users (and potential users) for continuous river and stream walks.
- When providing facilities, these should comply with access policy where feasible.
- Cyclists and other users needs. Consider where these are best placed and design for their use.

16.3 References

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